



Press Release
Immediate Release
13 June 2024

Blackburn Chef to Swim 'English Channel' For Charity

A HEAD Chef from a Blackburn mental health hospital will be swimming the equivalent of the English Channel after her husband was diagnosed with stage 4 mouth and throat cancer.

Blackburn-based Kath Brennan said the lives of her and her husband, Ged, "changed overnight," when he was diagnosed with cancer in 2021.

Now he has reached his one-year 'cancer free' mark, Kath is determined to raise funds and give back to MacMillan after she said, "the charity has been a lifeline to us both and been a tremendous support."

Having never swum before, the chef, who works at Cygnet Fountains, a mental health hospital for men on Pleasington Close, will be challenging herself to swim 21 miles throughout June and July. She describes the feat as her 'sink or swim' challenge.

Ged's symptoms started in 2019 with a small lump inside of his mouth and ear ache, the pain of which would spread down to his throat.

Kath explained: "It was the start of Covid and we tried to get an appointment with the doctor but they weren't seeing anyone.

"He was prescribed antibiotics but after finishing the course, his symptoms and pain were no better. After another phone appointment, he was given more medication but then it progressed and he started getting tingling all down the side of his tongue.

"We had to wait until 2021, when Covid was over before he could get a further appointment."

After finally seeing a consultant at an ENT clinic, Ged was given the devastating news that it was cancer.

"When we first opened the door to the consultant's room, it was full of all different nurses doctors.

"We were told that it was stage 4 mouth and tongue cancer. It was operable but they warned us it might cause complications and mean he wouldn't be able to eat, drink, swallow or speak.

"We had to make a decision there and then if he wanted to have the operation or not. From that day on, our lives would be changed completely."

Kath said the day Ged had his operation was "the longest day of my life".

"The impact on our lives has been tremendous, he can just about speak but not properly," she explained. "People find it hard to understand him and people don't take the time to listen to what he is saying."

"I have to repeat everything he says, he can't speak on the phone, so he can only text, we have stopped socialising, he can't eat anymore and we have to live the rest of his life on a peg feed.

"His face his very disfigured due to losing his jaw bone, because the radiotherapy was so powerful.

"He has lost three and a half stone in weight so he only weighs 7.5 stone now.

"We can't go out for a drink anymore either as Ged has an irreparable hole between his mouth and neck.

"My husband is still the man I fell in love with. He still annoys me, still makes me laugh, but I am in awe of his strength and determination to carry on and not give up."

Explaining why she is determined to raise funds for the charity, Kath explained: "Macmillan has helped us in so many ways from financial support through to emotional support.

"It helps just knowing that there is someone there to listen to your worries and concerns. They do so much not just for patient, but for families too.

"Since Ged was diagnosed, I have always put him first. I've been wanting to get into swimming for a while and kept seeing these charity events advertised. It was the virtual kick I needed, and a change to give something back so that they can carry on doing the wonderful work, help and support they are doing."

Describing the support both she and Ged have received from her employer, Cygnet Health Care, Kath explained:

"I have had so much support from my Cygnet Health Care colleagues, especially my line manager Serena. She allowed me to change my shifts whilst Ged was in hospital, have days off at short notice so that I could take him to appointments. Not to mention the emotional help and support from all of my colleagues who were so understanding."

To donate, go to <https://swimit.macmillan.org.uk/fundraising/kathryns-sink-or-swim-fundraiser-page>

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